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Young Afghans Debate on TV Series

USAID funds new television series featuring young debaters



Photo: USAID/APAP/IRI

New television series brings issues of national importance to viewers around the country.

Afghan youth participate in debates and learn about issues facing the country and how their members of parliament are responding.

Young people in Afghanistan have witnessed historic change in their country. Many youth participated in get-out-the-vote campaigns or voted for the first time during the 2010 parliamentary elections. Youth represent a key segment of society that is demanding action from their government and accountability on the part of their elected officials.

USAID is funding the second in a series of two television contests. The first was broadcast before the 2009 presidential election and was called *The Candidate*. The format was a reality-style show featuring young candidates running for election. This year's show is called "*The Candidate: Debates '90*," and features teams of young people debating topics of national importance that they want their members of parliament to focus on. Topics range from whether elections are sufficient to build democracy, to the role of women in politics, to the benefits of a centralized government versus a federal system.

The weekly television series, broadcast on Tolo Television, features each team of debaters as they weigh the pros and cons of debate topics and provides rebuttals to the other teams. A panel of three judges votes on the performance of each team and the viewing audience is invited to send in their votes via SMS. Background segments show teams conducting research, meeting with government officials and members of parliament to explore ideas and issues, and practicing their debates with their team coaches. As low-scoring teams are sent to the 'danger zone,' tension and dramatic suspense mounts on which teams will make it to the next episode. Teams are voted off until only two teams remain for the final debate, aired during a special finale in August. Throughout the 13-episode series, the viewing audience is challenged to consider the very important issues being discussed and how their elected officials are responding to these issues.

The show has been instrumental in raising awareness about the legislative process and bringing the views of young people to thousands of viewers across the country. As debater Ahmad Rashed Ahmadi noted, "Programs for the young generation to express their ideas are important. Young people are the iron pillar of the country and their activities will make democracy."